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ABSTRACT

Presented is the program development for volunteer services that are intended to expand the educational opportunities of the gifted. The program focuses on utilizing community resources and coordinating the resources with the school program. Aspects of the program discussed include: community attitudes toward the gifted in the school system that may affect educational programing for the gifted; relationship of community to educational programing for the gifted; identification of community resources that can be utilized in educational planning and programing for the gifted; identification of modifications and administrative provisions needed in the present school program to make an effective program for the gifted; procedures for arranging and planning for volunteer services for the gifted; identification of duties and responsibilities of volunteers and school staff; and choice of evaluation procedures that can be used for volunteer services for the gifted. The author advocates establishment of a community resource file to identify talented and gifted persons in the community who are willing to volunteer to help the gifted students. (CB)

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ADMINISTERING PROGRAMS FOR VOLUNTEER SERVICES FOR THE GIFTED

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An assumption is often made that the public school system is totally capable of educating the gifted. While the schools can do much to provide more challenging opportunities, it must be pointed out that most schools, if not all schools are surrounded by communities rich in resources that could be utilized and coordinated with the school program. For example, there are scientists in most communities who are willing and some are eager to provide gifted children with learning experiences in research areas of medicine, ecology, conservation, oceanography, electronics and biochemistry. In addition, there are artists, musicians, craftsmen and writers who are willing to give of their time and talents to motivate and help develop the creative abilities of gifted children. The opening of the lines of communication between the schools and the community resources could do much to multiply the effectiveness of programs for the gifted.

If we accept the challenge and demand to provide educational opportunities for the gifted, then we need to seek and find answers to questions such as:

1. Are there community attitudes toward the gifted in your school system that will affect educational programming for the gifted?
2. How is the community to be related to educational programming for the gifted?
3. What community resources are there that can be utilized in educational planning and programming for the gifted?
4. What modifications and administrative provisions need to be made in the present school program to make it an effective program for the gifted?
5. How do you arrange and plan for volunteer services for the gifted?

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6. What are the duties and responsibilities of the volunteers? School staff?
7. What evaluation procedures could be used for volunteer services for the gifted?

Now I would like to offer some possible solutions to those seven questions. The questions of are there community attitudes toward the gifted in your school system that will affect educational programming for the gifted and how is the community to be related to educational programming for the gifted will, of course, depend on conditions and situations in your individual school system. However, these are matters that are the direct responsibilities of the local Directors or Coordinators of Exceptional Children and will require a great deal of time and effort. There are many pluses which can be gained for your total exceptional child program as a result of your efforts on these two questions. In building acceptance of programs for the gifted thorough communication both within professional groups and between lay and professional groups is essential. If provisions are made for all to understand the purposes and procedures of a program and to be informed regarding why it differs from the regular program, confidence in the program and reasonable assurance of its success will be established.

Provisions must be made for continuous interpretation of the program, because an interpretation that is made when the program is introduced and not followed by other interpretations will not produce the required results. Unless teachers, parents, and the community are kept informed they inevitably wonder what is going on.

The question of what community resources are there that can be utilized in educational planning and programming for the gifted is one of utmost importance. Because as usual in educational endeavors we do not have sufficient money and people to do many of the things we would like to do. But in all communities

you can find talented and gifted people with special interests and abilities who will be glad to help with your program and who will truly enjoy working with gifted children --- all you have to do is ask them. The same is true of some types of equipment and materials -- local colleges or technical schools will allow your students to use their specialized equipment and labs, libraries, museums, art galleries, local theatre groups, local musical groups and the like. An inventive and open-minded teacher will find many ways in which community resources can contribute to the enrichment of the school program. This is true both for classroom projects and for special activities to challenge the gifted. One of Conant's strongest recommendations was for the abolition of high schools, found mainly in rural areas, which have graduating classes of less than 100. There is little doubt that the problems of the gifted child in a small rural high school with limited faculty and limited numbers of students of similar ability are severe. This would, also, be true of small rural elementary schools. One attempt to handle such a situation was reported by Morris in 1957. In a rural area of New York State, the district superintendent and principals of six schools launched an experimental program for talented youth. As Morris describes it, "Once each week on alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays students from grades 11 and 12 are brought together by cars and station wagons for an afternoon of experience designed especially for them and call the Youth Seminar." The resources for this group were not large. They had to meet in a room that was not planned for such a situation but was available, and they had to conduct the program without laboratory or other specialized equipment. The faculty consisted of those people who were available and interested. For this particular group it was a "home making teacher, guidance counselor, and county director of pupil personnel services, who served as chairman of the group. Other teachers served in an advisory capacity." The purpose of the program was to provide the students with opportunities to integrate knowledge, clarify and deepen concepts, and

develop appreciations. These aims were attained by giving students the opportunity to ask questions and to follow through on answering them without concern for grade or credit. The range of questions asked by the members of this seminar is adequate evidence of the needs of rural youth to have the same enrichment advantages as these provided by more organized urban communities.

Some of the questions asked were:

"What makes people respond to art?"

"Why are beliefs right for some but not important for others?"

"How does God communicate with man?"

"How is knowledge obtained?"

"What is the difference between aesthetic appreciation and knowledge?"

"How are values established?"

The discussions were carried on in an informal seminar. Presentations were made, the common element in the situation being an experience shared by all the students, such as a particular book, movie, or musical composition. The students were generally enthusiastic about the program. One student commented that "it made me think more deeply on subjects I didn't think were important. In regular class the answer is right or wrong but in the seminar you examine what everyone says, and we had the opportunity to develop our thoughts orally without fear of criticism."

Morris concluded that gifted rural high school students have serious questions to ask but have not had adequate opportunity to ask or answer them. For example, the faculty learned that discussion of such topics as "What is the good and what is the evil?" were highly appreciated by the students. They also felt the need of more opportunity to discuss human relations and problems of family life. This is one example of how attempts can be made to improve the educational programming for gifted children even under less than favorable conditions.

One of the most useful devices in educating gifted children is the community

resource file. A systematic effort is made to locate specialists in the community who are willing to help students interested in their particular field. Pertinent information is recorded on cards which are then filed under the names of parents who have volunteered their services. Later, this file is supplemented by cards of specialists in the community. In one school the file is kept in the school library where it is brought up-to-date frequently by parents from the parent-teacher association.

Once a good community resource file is available it is used in various ways. Specialists are asked to come to the school to describe their work. Groups of students visit the specialists. Top students are assigned to research specialists as part-time apprentices, to a group of artists in a museum for periodic criticism or to natives of other countries for practice in foreign language conversation. Sometimes specialists in writing and literature are called upon to review the students' creative writing.

Even in small communities, resource files have proved to be of value. A large percentage of such a community is included. The variety of odd occupations and hobbies discovered is often amazing and stimulating to students. Occasionally a national celebrity, although possibly only a part-time resident, is willing to aid in his particular field.

What modifications and administrative provisions need to be made in the present school program to make it an effective program for the gifted is a matter to be determined locally. However, this is a program where it is absolutely necessary for the special educators to talk and work cooperatively with the general educators. Because they can kill a gifted program if they do not understand or believe in what is being done. They need to be in on the planning for gifted programs from the very beginning. The most important point to remember is that the program for the gifted must be something different than that which they could receive in the regular grades. It cannot be more of the same thing that

they received in their regular grades or it is not a program for the gifted. It must be of greater depth and breadth in program and instruction.

How does a teacher of the gifted arrange for volunteer help? First, check the community resource file to find a specialist in the particular area desired and the type of presentation wanted. Contact the resource person either in person or by phone. Be specific with details such as date and time, presentation and topic desired, and send this information on provided form to county Director of Exceptional Child Programs. Teacher planning can pay large dividends in using volunteers effectively.

In order for the volunteer selected to be most effective for your class or individual students, the school staff must consider seriously their duties and responsibilities:

first, decide specifically what you would like the volunteer to do. Perhaps, schedule a pre-briefing session with the volunteer to:

1. determine the special abilities of the volunteer;
2. inform the volunteer of your expectations.

Prepare the children so that they will know who the volunteer is and what he or she will be doing.

Have plan and materials when appropriate ready when the volunteer comes.

Make sure the volunteer feels you are available to answer questions and give guidance.

The volunteer has duties and responsibilities which include:

1. ascertaining the amount and kinds of knowledge and ability the students have concerning the volunteer's particular area at the beginning and at the end of the presentation. This can be done informally and with the aid of the teacher.
2. giving the best presentation of which you are capable.

3. filling out an evaluation of the program upon completion of your participation.

Both the volunteers and the school staff should agree that:

1. A volunteer works under the direction and supervision of a teacher or other member of the school staff.
2. A volunteer is not expected to perform professional services of the classroom teacher who is responsible for content and techniques.
3. A volunteer is not a substitute for a member of the school staff, but one supplying supplemental and supportive services.
4. A volunteer should not divulge confidential information to which he or she may have access in the classroom or in the school.
5. Evaluation by the school staff of the volunteer should be confidential.

It is important for the teacher to remember to write a thank you note to the volunteer for the service rendered.

Evaluation procedures which could be used for volunteer services for the gifted are an evaluation by the school staff of the volunteer, evaluation by the students of the volunteer, and an evaluation of the program by the volunteers upon completion of their participation. This could be accomplished by evaluation forms designed for these purposes with spaces for additional comments. An item to keep in mind is that evaluation of the program is a medium of constant communication for those interested in the program.